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NSC BRIEFING

14 September 1960

LAOS

- I. Repudiation of Souvanna Phouma government by General Phoumi and Inspector General of kingdom Prince Boun Oum has put off a resolution of the Laotian crisis.
- A. Boun Oum, 50-year-old hereditary ruler of principality in southern Laos who renounced claims in 1946 in favor of unified Laos under king of Luang Prabang, has been described as earthy, practical man of action widely respected in southern Laos.
1. During last war Boun Oum led anti-Japanese resistance; in 1954 he led commando troops against Viet Minh.
 2. Was prime minister in 1949-50.
 3. Favors alignment with West and imposition of authoritarian government.
- B. The Revolutionary Committee, chaired by Boun Oum, proclaimed over Radio Savannakhet on 10 September that it had temporarily abolished the constitution, "ousted" the Souvanna government, and decreed martial law throughout Laos.
- C. All military commanders, civil servants, and people were urged to recognize the authority of Boun Oum and to disregard Vientiane orders.
- D. Action was justified on grounds that weakness of Souvanna government had encouraged Communist Pathet Lao to open new campaign of military and political pressures designed to win control of country.

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- II. In effect, Boun Oum and Phoumi have set up de facto government in Savannakhet, but they apparently do not intend this to be a separatist regime at least at this time.
- A. Boun Oum and Phoumi have pledged support to King Savang and have sent emissaries to Luang Prabang to explain their actions.
- III. Boun Oum, said to be "guiding light" of the Revolutionary Committee, is reported to have briefed [REDACTED] in early^{25X6} September on his plans.
- A. Following the disruption of the Vientiane government by sabotage and psychological warfare, he would mount a military siege of the capital.
1. However he did not anticipate major hostilities.
- B. When the government surrendered, Boun Oum would "take over" and decide on the form of the new government--probably a confederation of states as in Malaya.
- C. Boun Oum allegedly [REDACTED] that he and his group would^{25X6} proceed even without the king's approval but that this undoubtedly would be given.
- D. [REDACTED] is said to have promised Boun Oum a political and a military advisor and stated he might consider other assistance.
- IV. Phoumi claims the loyalty of the four military regions outside Vientiane, but their sustained allegiance and unity of purpose are questionable. (For example, commander of 1st Military Region has reversed field twice.)
- A. Phoumi's financial and material resources are limited.
- V. Thus far, Souvanna has reacted to Phoumi's challenge with moderation, apparently still hoping for a compromise reconciliation.

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- A. He has declared a state of emergency throughout the country, but has not yet branded Phoumi a rebel.
- B. He has cancelled pending negotiations with Pathet Lao on grounds Phoumi's defection has dangerously weakened his bargaining position.

VI. Souvanna, informed by Ambassador Brown that the king apparently will not intervene in his behalf, has stated he may resign.

- A. He said king's attitude clearly indicated lack of confidence in him and his government.
- B. Souvanna has also apparently been turning over in his mind possibility of appealing to UN Security Council on ground that if civil war broke out in Laos, the crisis would be quickly internationalized: Thailand and South Vietnam would intervene on Phoumi's side, giving Communist China and North Vietnam the pretext Souvanna believes they have been waiting for.

VII. Present situation vulnerable to Communist exploitation.

- A. Resolution of crisis in favor General Phoumi would be unacceptable to Kong Le, who still controls Vientiane, and he might make common purpose with Pathet Lao.
- B. Protracted power struggle between Phoumi and Souvanna would erode central government's authority and further split the military, leaving the country open to Communist takeover.
- C. Pathet Lao have stepped up guerilla attacks in northern Sam Neua and Phong Saly Provinces reminiscent of situation last summer.

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